

# Relational Knowledge in Artistic Research

in search of a reality that can only be clarified through art

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# Context - governing agencies

“For the purposes of the REF [Research Excellence Framework], research is defined as a process of investigation leading to new insights, *effectively shared*.”

Research Excellence Framework (Ed.). (2019). *REF 2021 - Guidance on submissions*, p. 90.

## Context - governing agencies

“Creative works, no matter how highly esteemed, cannot in themselves be regarded as outputs of research. They can only become so in association with explanatory or contextualising text.”

UK Council for Graduate Education (Ed.). (1997). *Practice-based doctorates in the creative and performing arts and design*, p. 17.

## Context - governing agencies

“Artistic performance is normally excluded from R&D. Artistic performances fail the novelty test of R&D as they are looking for a new expression, rather than for new knowledge.”

OECD (Ed.). (2015). *Frascati manual 2015: Guidelines for collecting and reporting data on research and experimental development*, p. 65.

# Context - epistemology

“The traditional analysis of knowledge applies primarily to propositional knowledge (also referred to as ‘knowing that’ or ‘factual knowledge’). Propositional knowledge takes the form ‘S knows that P’ where P stands for a declarative sentence expressing some proposition. Apart from propositional knowledge philosophers recognize two main kinds of knowledge, namely practical knowledge (or ‘knowing how’) and knowledge of people, places and things (or ‘knowledge by acquaintance’). Within propositional knowledge [...]”

↘ also known as ‘experiential knowledge’

Bernecker, S., & Dretske, F. (2000). *Knowledge: Readings in contemporary epistemology*. Oxford university press, p. 3.

# The “problem” of know-how

“I have known old-fashioned workmen refuse to use likely-looking timber because they held it to be unfit for the job.

And they knew. The skilled workman was the final judge. Under the plane (it is little used now) or under the axe (it is all but obsolete) timber disclosed qualities hardly to be found otherwise. My own eyes know because my own hands have felt, *but I cannot teach an outsider the difference* between ash that is “tough as whipcord,” and ash that is “frow as a carrot,” or “doaty,” or “biscuity.” In oak, in beech, these differences are equally plain, yet only to those who have been initiated by practical work.”

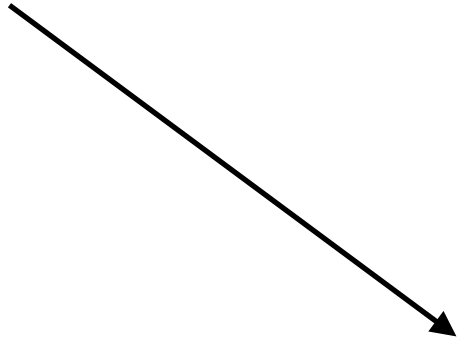
George Sturt, as cited in Dreyfus, H. L., & Kelly, S. D. (2011). *All things shining: Reading the Western classics to find meaning in a secular age*. Free Press, chapter 7.

What is art *about*?

(short and clear answers only, please!)

# What is art *about*?

art is about *what it is like* to be a human being [...]



which seems to suggest that it is about experiential knowledge



## Experience vs relation

“It is said that man experiences his world. What does that mean? Man travels over the surface of things and experiences them. He extracts knowledge about their constitution from them: he wins an experience from them. He experiences what belongs to the things. But the world is not presented to man by experiences alone.

[...]

The man who experiences has not part in the world. For it is ‘in him’ and not between him and the world that the experience arises. The world has no part in the experience. It permits itself to be experienced, but has no concern in the matter. For it does nothing to the experience, and the experience does nothing to it.

As experience, the world belongs to the primary word *I–It*. The primary word *I–Thou* establishes the world of relation.”

# Relational ontology

“Can we speak of [...] an *ontology of relation*? [...]

The reply to this question will be affirmative if we can prove that the fact signified by the word *relation* may (in certain circumstances) have an *ontological* content, that *relation* may constitute an ontological fact — that is, a *mode* of existence or even a *foundational* fact of existence.

Such a possibility would seem to be excluded by the semantic content (the meaning) that normal language [...] bestows on the term *relation*: relation presupposes that the factors which constitute it — the *terms* or *constituents* of the fact of relation, the parts related to each other — actually exist.”

# Relational knowledge

“— What, then, do we experience of *Thou*?

— Just nothing. For we do not experience it.

— What, then, do we know of *Thou*?

— Just everything. For we know nothing isolated about it any more.”

Buber, M. (2013). *I and Thou* (R.G. Smith, Trans.). Bloomsbury Academic, p. 8.

# Relational knowledge vs postmodern nihilism

“Look man, we’d probably most of us agree that these are dark times, and stupid ones, but do we need fiction that does nothing but dramatize how dark and stupid everything is? In dark times, the definition of good art would seem to be art that locates and applies CPR to those elements of what’s human and magical that still live and glow despite the times’ darkness. Really good fiction could have as dark a worldview as it wished, but it’d find a way both to depict this world and to illuminate the possibilities for being alive and human in it.”

David Foster Wallace, as cited in Dreyfus, H. L., & Kelly, S. D. (2011). *All things shining: Reading the Western classics to find meaning in a secular age*. Free Press, chapter 2.

# What is artistic research about?

my proposal: artistic research is about relational knowledge

Relational knowledge is not knowledge *about* the kinds of relations we establish with things, but knowledge about the ways in which we can relate to them.

It does not come from the relations that artists already have, but from the *insights* that they find when *investigating* how to establish them.

It is *effectively shared* when others can use the outcomes of that research to expand their relational outreach with the world.

# Implications for relational knowledge in artistic research:

*1. one is unlikely to be able to formulate a complete traditional research proposal from the start*

“We must distinguish between an activity-description that is incomplete because it adopts too general a level of description [...], and one that is incomplete because it describes only the beginning of a long process. If we fail to make this distinction, we will think that incompleteness always calls for a more specific description, as opposed to calling for us take in a longer swath of the phenomenon. This is to say that it is possible that our description is incomplete because the thing we are describing has not been completed. Some forms of agency are not homogeneous in their rational structure; instead of having the structure of a game governed by a determinate set of rules throughout the course of play, they have the structure of a blurry image gradually coming into view.”

Callard, A. (2017). Liberal Education and the Possibility of Valuational Progress. *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 34(2), 1–22, p. 18.

# Implications for relational knowledge in artistic research:

*2. methodology — and by that I mean any methodology — will most likely lead us astray*

“The relation to the *Thou* is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between *I* and *Thou*. The memory itself is transformed, as it plunges out of its isolation into the unity of the whole. No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between *I* and *Thou*. Desire itself is transformed as it plunges out of its dream into the appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about.”

Buber, M. (2013). *I and Thou* (R.G. Smith, Trans.). Bloomsbury Academic, p. 9.



# Implications for relational knowledge in artistic research:

## 3. *documentation as a surrogate for the occurrence of practice will not work*

“For the vast majority of practice research outputs, it is not possible for research audiences to experience the practice first hand, and as a result ‘documentation’ is employed as a proxy for practice. [...] Within practice research, documentation can act as the surrogate for the occurrence of practice, with a research narrative often providing further context and explanation.”

Bulley, J., & Sahin, O. (2021). *Practice Research - Report 1: What is practice research? and Report 2: How can practice research be shared?* British Library, p. 45.

thank you!  
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